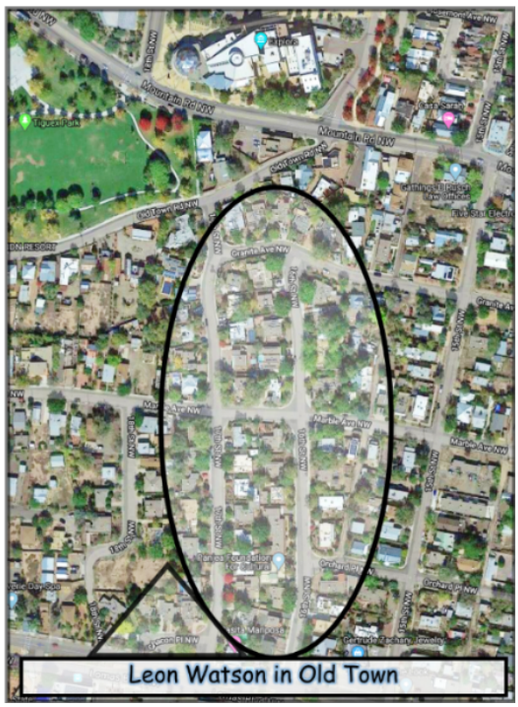
February

Pueblo Revival Architecture: **Leon Watson in Old Town**
&
Sweet Mediterranean-Style Home in
Nob Hill's Monte Vista Triangle Open Sunday



Welcome to the oldest MetroABQ neighborhood: Albuquerque's Old Town, founded (officially) over 300 years ago, in 1706. The area was a small, dusty desert outpost then; now the Metro area is home to almost a million people. It wasn't until the railroad boom came through in the late 1880's, that the city began to develop much outside the Old Town area, such as the creation of the Huning Highlands neighborhood, the city's 1st 'suburb.' By the early 1900's, TB sufferers poured into the area for possible relief & they helped to vastly expand the population & the city footprint.

Enter a man named Leon Watson in the 1930's. He arrived from Florida & was used to working with hollow clay blocks--"penitentiary block"--influenced from the Florida Spanish Moorish style. Wonderful for the Florida climate; however, it can get mighty cold here in the desert Southwest. Around the 1940's he evolved to materials easily accessed in the desert: sand & clay: adobe. Most 1940's Watson's were built of adobe--baked earth; included was often rough-sawn timber, & because their walls were thick adobe & had earth-insulated (sand) roofs, they were regarded as energy efficient in the 1940's.

Leon Watson was a prolific builder of adobe homes during a career that spanned more than four decades. He clearly put his stamp on an area of east Old Town: a few-blocks east & south of the ABQ Museum & steps from the lush, 8.5 acre Tiguex Park, Watson built a few dozen homes in the Spanish Pueblo Revival style. As homes had already spread further east, Watson's Old Town neighborhood, the Chacon Addition, could be considered among one of the city's first infill projects.

Above is a map of that area in Old Town, with the perhaps two dozen Watson Adobes clustered along 16th & 17th Sts in the oval, & more reside along a short stretch of Marble Ave. He also developed a few homes adjacent to Lomas Blvd, on the five-home cul-de-sac of Chacon Place, shown by a triangle on the map.

The following images are of quintessential exterior features of many Leon Watson homes in the Chacon Addition. Notice the stylized carved vigas & miniature Mission bell tower immediately below. Next is an exaggerated thick Mission entry with bell, that may have been added later, with typical wood canales to the right that shunt water from the roof.

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Many of his homes in the area have low front walls with front yard courtyard or patio space, an example image with the blue door two above. Directly above is an image of a Watson Adobe with a uniquely-carved corbel, which spans the door & sidelight windows, continuing into the structure on both sides. I love how it appears to support the organically stacked entry piers.

Many unique interior features can often be attributed to Leon Watson. I imagine that the features in the mages below were designed by Watson; however, after ~80 years, improvements/alterations are inevitable, many adding to the character of the homes. Below are some examples.

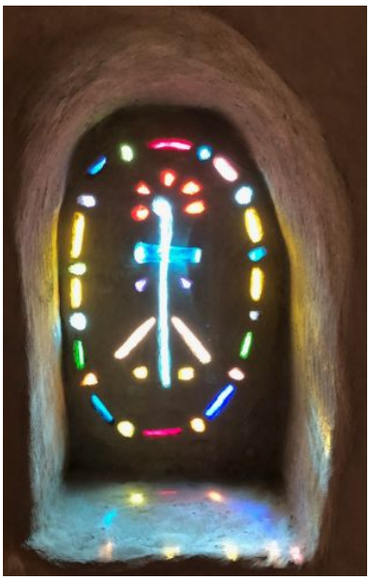
The two images directly above & the five images below are from a Watson home that I recently helped sell on 16th St. It had (typical?) punched tin kitchen cabinet fronts, rough-hewn viga beams, a Kiva fireplace centerpiece, (often) a smaller Kiva fireplace in the largest bedroom; also, many had radiant heat concrete floors, plus random nichos & wall carvings, like the adobe-serpent carved above the nicho in the second bedroom, four images below.

I was fortunate to list that home for sale, at 711 16th St NW. It was popular: it received offers during an Open House, hours after going on the market. The 3-D Virtual Walking Tour is a great way to explore the home, from your home.

Watson Contemporary. One of the standouts from an architectural tour I attended a few years ago was the Watson Adobe on 16th St, above, bought by an architect who modernized the space nicely. By installing a steel I beam to support the viga ceiling beams, he was able to remove walls, opening up the kitchen to the living & dining rooms. This brings more light into the interior of the home, making the space feel larger.

MetroABQ's Public Art. A fantastic bookend to the neighborhood is a 37-year-old art installation by the city of Albuquerque's Public Art program. Sensational city-wide One Percent For Art installations can be found everywhere!

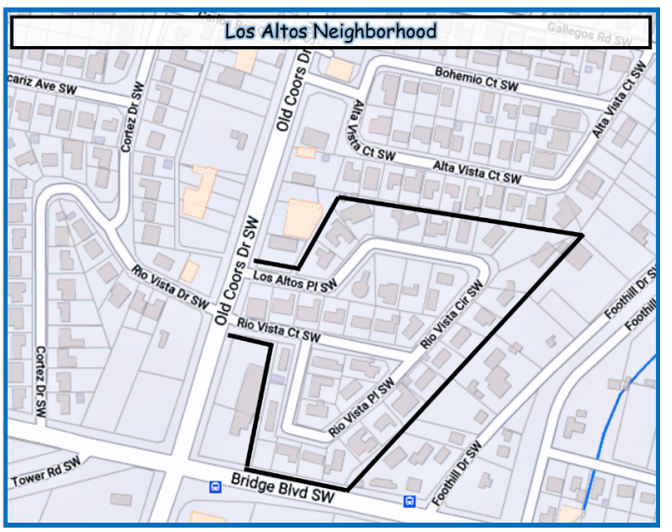
The sculpture, by artist Federico Armijo, is a whimsical collage, & sits on the corner of Lomas & 16th St. Called Formas Esperando Palabra de Otros Mundos, 1983, it becomes more intricate the more one walks around it. It may translate loosely to "shapes waiting for word from other worlds." I have passed it for decades & am thrilled to finally see it up close.



Above & below are two stained glass window features seen in Watson's adobes, each found miles apart. The colorful nicho above is from the 711 16th St property & sits in a bedroom there. The vivid window/wall scene below, adjacent to the (typical) living room Kiva, is from a Watson home in the community of Los Altos, a discreet pocket neighborhood in the South Valley near Bridge & Old Coors Blvds.

Leon Watson's Los Altos neighborhood has all the unique features the prolific developer is known for. Above is one sample of a fanciful façade found in that pocket neighborhood. As it doesn't fit neatly into any one style, I'm calling it the Watson Vernacular style, because of the stepped parapet & random cascading sidelight windows next to the door.

Below, outlined in black, is a map of the Los Altos neighborhood.



Where Is The Monte Vista Triangle?

Square in the middle of a Nob Hill neighborhood, is a group of notable historic residences, just north of Route 66/Central Ave. The area, bounded by Monte Vista, Carlisle & Campus Blvds, is a triangle on the east end of the Monte Vista Addition. Generally built in the 1920's, 1930's & 1940's, each home feels unique, & the diversity of style--Mediterranean, Territorial, Spanish Pueblo Revival, Mid-Century Modern, SW Vernacular & Ranch styles--is, well, darn diverse. Walk along Amherst, Berkeley or Purdue & you'll see what I mean...

Open House in the Monte Vista Triangle:
425 Amherst NE :

Sunday February 16th, 425 Amherst Drive NE will be available to tour, from 1-3pm.

Currently listed for sale, seen below, the classic Mediterranean-style two bedroom, two bath home is a fabulous example of the historic homes that live in the area. The home sits in the Nob Hill Neighborhood of Monte Vista Addition, just south of Lomas & Carlisle Blvds.

The full listing can be found here.

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